

Sujay Thakur  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Gangadharpur Mahavidyamandir  
University of Calcutta  
[sujaythakur2@gmail.com](mailto:sujaythakur2@gmail.com)

### **Invisible palate(s) in a violent *savarna*-human centric world**

“A minister produces a thief in front of the king. When he reads out the list of his crimes, the king declares, ‘give *fashi* (hang him) to this man right away!’. The thief, extremely surprised, says in a happy voice, licking his lips in anticipation: ‘Wah! You are going to serve me *fashi*? In this royal palace? Serve it please. It’s my favourite!’” (**Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada, Shahu Patole**)

To give *fashi*, in legal languages is to hang one until the epiglottis breaks leading to death of a person. And yet *fashi* is also a culinary word for the Mang and Mahar communities of Maharashtra. Shahu Patole’s book goes on to describe it in details – ‘*fashi* begins where the tongue ends ... it is a thin, dark and elongated piece of flesh, with a purple or bluish tinge and is a few centimeters thick. It has a coating that looks like plastic glazing ... like a thin chocolate cake. The surface flesh looks like jelly. Underneath is dark, chocolaty flesh and is cooked in its own juices while cooking’. This elaborate example goes to show how language completely collapses in face of different material realities – in this case it is of caste laden dominations. In classical humanism, the sovereign king embodies rational authority, law, and language, while the thief, marked by caste, is reduced to a disposable body. The legal meaning of *fashi* (execution) belongs to this humanist order, where the state exercises power over life and death.

Braidotti argues that the posthuman condition dismantles such anthropocentric and hierarchical binaries, instead a continuum between human and non-human is seen, along with flesh carrying meaning, and life with matter. In Patole’s anecdote, *fashi* destabilises the boundary between death and sustenance. The same bodily matter - the epiglottis, functions simultaneously as an instrument of execution and as food. This overlap resonates with Braidotti’s idea of *zoe*, the non-human, vital life force that exceeds juridical and moral categorisation. For Dalit communities, *fashi* is not abject waste but an arena of *zoe* which is edible, nourishing, and culturally meaningful.

The thief’s (joyful) misreading thus becomes a posthuman moment. It interrupts the sovereign, humanist language and reclaims flesh as vital materiality rather than condemned body. Patole’s sensuous description of texture, colour, and taste foregrounds the agency of matter itself, aligning with Braidotti’s emphasis on embodied, material ethics. What the state names as death is re-signified through Dalit food practices into survival and continuity. In this sense, Dalit culinary

knowledge performs a posthuman critique by refusing the dominant hierarchy that privileges abstract law over lived, embodied relations with matter, animals, and life. These practices are not exotic culinary curiosities. They are technologies of survival produced under severe conditions of historical deprivation, not limited to, exclusion from land ownership, restricted access to free life, untouchability, and in this paper's context (and otherwise) - denial of "respectable" cuts of meat.

In dominant medical discourse epiglottis is a minor anatomical structure – a thin flap of cartilage at the root of the tongue that prevents food from entering the windpipe. In legal language however, it becomes a site of death, ruptured during hanging and marking the passage from life to execution leading to one's eventual death. In Dalit culinary cultures, particularly among Mang and Mahar communities of Maharashtra the same epiglottis, called *fashi*, remains textured, nourishing, slow-cooked, and culturally valued food. Along with tongues, horns, intestines, blood, hooves, and cartilage, it belongs to a repertoire of edible "leftovers" that dominant castes often defines as waste, pollution, or taboo. Here the knowledge about the epiglottis which the thief in the story generates is not metaphorical but material. It emerges from centuries of forced proximity to animal carcasses, leatherwork, and 'lowly' occupations imposed upon Dalits through caste segregation (Omvedt, 1994). What dominant society deems waste or pollution becomes nourishment. The epiglottis thus embodies what Gopal Guru calls "humiliated materiality": the transformation of social degradation into practical knowledge (Guru, 2009). For the thief, it is embodied nourishment. This disjunction underlines what Bourdieu calls *symbolic power*: the power to impose meaning (Bourdieu, 1991). Caste society often enforces linguistic hierarchies where elite (upper caste) meanings dominate, while subaltern meanings remain illegible. Yet the Dalit interpretation refuses linguistic submission.

The thief's body remembers what the law forgets, that flesh can feed as well as be destroyed. Rosi Braidotti defines posthumanism in her work *The Posthuman* as a rejection of the humanist subject centred on autonomy, rationality, and dominance over nature (Braidotti, 2013). Instead, she proposes the impersonal, non-human life that flows across species, organs, and material forms. In this regard the epiglottis is an ideal posthuman object because it is neither fully symbolic nor merely biological. It moves between animal and human bodies, crosses the boundary between death and nourishment, and resists stable meaning.

For Dalit communities, *fashi*, thus embodies life continuing through flesh that upper caste society associates only with death or impurity. The epiglottis becomes a unit of survival that escapes moral judgement. In this sense, Dalit existence itself becomes posthuman—not because it is inhuman, but because it has historically been forced outside the category of the fully "human" defined by Brahmanical modernity (Ilaiah, 1996). Reading Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* (2024) alongside major posthuman thinkers—Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Deleuze and Guattari—and grounding this analysis in B. R. Ambedkar's materialist critique of caste, it may be proposed that Dalit food practices transform discarded

animal matter into epistemology. The Dalit body emerges not merely as a victim of caste oppression but as a posthuman agent of knowledge, producing theory through flesh, taste, labour, digestion, and survival.

Current day India not only remains deeply humanist in its ideals but also puts caste and casteism in its material structures. Dalits are legally citizens but socially disposable. Their labour sustains society, yet their bodies remain vulnerable to violence, erasure, and pollution narratives. The epiglottis offers a counter-ontology where it rejects purity and stable dignity granted from above. Additionally, it affirms survival through material continuity. Braidotti argues for an ethics grounded not in abstract rights but in *embedded, embodied relations* (Braidotti, 2013). Dalit food practices already perform such an ethics. They demonstrate how life persists not through recognition but through metabolic intimacy with matter. The Dalit subject is not merely a political victim but a posthuman agent whose knowledge is encoded in organs, textures, and tastes. It insists that flesh has multiple economies. Where caste sees pollution, the Dalit body sees nourishment, where state sees execution, the Dalit body sees food, and so on. The epiglottis then emerges as a political metaphor for the Dalit future, where life persists in-between death-dealing instruments.

If Ambedkar demanded entry into the category of the 'human', Dalit cuisine demonstrates what happens when humanity itself is insufficient as a framework for survival. Caste ridden society often marks elite meanings as correct and Dalit meanings as error or vulgarity. But the Dalit meaning of *fashi* is not a mistake. It is an embodied semiotics grounded in metabolism rather than statute. The epiglottis thus becomes a linguistic anomaly that reveals the material base of meaning. Words do not float freely; they ferment in social flesh. Hence the epiglottis in question here can be a unit of *zoe* (as put by Bradoitte in her work [The Politics of Life/Zoe](#), 2008). It passes from animal throat to human stomach, from execution site to nourishment, from waste to value. For Dalits, *zoe* is not theoretical speculation but everyday metabolism. Donna Haraway argues that humans and animals exist in entangled "naturecultures." Eating is not merely consumption but relation. Dalit food practices enact this relational ethics where animals are not abstract commodities and every organ is used where death is followed by careful redistribution. The tongue eaten by the Dalit eater once tasted grass - the epiglottis once protected breath. These organs carry interspecies histories into the human gut.

Deleuze and Guattari's "Body without Organs" imagines a body freed from hierarchical organisation. Dalit cuisine achieves something similar in reverse: organs are not subordinated to the whole animal but valued individually. The epiglottis is not minor, the tongue is not secondary. Each organ is a centre of taste and technique. Caste organises bodies vertically, and Dalit cuisine reorganises them horizontally. The Dalit body thus becomes a laboratory of posthuman survival. It metabolises what is rejected, it learns from animal matter and stores history in digestion. The epiglottis is not merely an organ it becomes a philosophical object. In

law, it signifies death, in caste ideology it signifies pollution, whereas in Dalit kitchens, it signifies survival/life.

Through organs/parts discarded by the upper castes —epiglottis, tongues, horns, blood—Dalits construct a posthuman knowledge system grounded in material intimacy rather than abstraction. Patole and Braidotti provide the archive and vocabulary respectively, and Ambedkar supplies the political horizon. Together read, they reveal that Dalit existence is not only a struggle for recognition but a practice of survival that already exceeds the humanist imagination. In an increasingly divided India, the epiglottis teaches us that dignity may not begin in law but in the stubborn intelligence of bodies that refuse to starve. The Dalit body becomes a thinking body—not in spite of its materiality but because of it.

In conclusion, India today is simultaneously futuristic and feudal where biometric citizenship is laced with lynching; artificial intelligence cannot alleviate manual scavenging, or digital purity coexists with ritualistic pollution. Humanist promises of equality often collapse into pieces before material hierarchy(s). Posthuman Dalit existence does not wait for recognition. It persists through metabolic networks with animals, heat, waste, and hunger. The epiglottis resists digitization, sanitization, ritual abstraction. It insists that life is viscous and stubborn. And it will find and/or generate self-knowledge through its material realities of Dalits in India filtering through the abstract binds of century old caste systems.

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